

National Heritage Team of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Oral History Program

Subject/USFW Retiree: Jack Fillio

No. 3101802

Date:

Interviewed by: Dorothe Norton

Dorothe Norton:

Good morning Jack, my name's Dorothe Norton and I'm here to do this interview for the Archives. So the first thing I want to know about you is your birthplace and date.

Jack Fillio:

I was born October 31st, 1938, in Pittsfield, Massachusetts.

Dorothe Norton:

And your parent's names?

Jack Fillio:

Newman and Irene. My father passed away about 5 or 6 years ago.

Dorothe Norton:

What was your dad's job as you were growing up?

Jack Fillio:

He was a supervisor on the night shift at the General Electric Company in Pittsfield, which basically Pittsfield was just GE. He worked on gun directors and things like that, somewhat of a classified nature.

Dorothe Norton:

Did your mom work at all or just...?

Jack Fillio:

She worked off and on part-time.

Dorothe Norton:

Anything special she did?

Jack Fillio:

Many, many years ago in the summers I'd work at a Berkshire Woolen Company where my mom worked, they made cloth and stuff like that.

Dorothe Norton:

How else did you spend your early years?

Jack Fillio:

Well, every Saturday in the spring dad and I fished, and every Saturday in the fall dad and I hunted.

Dorothe Norton:
Well that's good, and did you like that?

Jack Fillio:
Oh yeah, I enjoyed it and I still do.

Dorothe Norton:
What high school did you go to?

Jack Fillio:
Pittsfield High School.

Dorothe Norton:
And what year did you graduate?

Jack Fillio:
I graduated in 1956.

Dorothe Norton:
And then how about a university?

Jack Fillio:
I went to Northeastern University for a year. I followed my older brother there in engineering class. I didn't like that, so I quit college and went into the Marine Corps for 4 years.

Dorothe Norton:
What were your duty stations while you were in the military?

Jack Fillio:
Basically, we were stationed in Hawaii, but we were in a Fleet Marine Force specific. We were Radio Company that would monitor the opposition plus our own forces during practices and war games and things like that. So, we traveled all over; the Philippines, Japan, every place, Okinawa, Kwajalein. We were all over the place in the Pacific.

Dorothe Norton:
Did you get any decorations?

Jack Fillio:
No, no. Just 3 years, 9 months, and 17 days, and then back to college!

Dorothe Norton:
Wow! You did go back to college, okay. So when then did you graduate from college?

Jack Fillio:

I graduated in 1965, from the University of Massachusetts with a degree in wildlife management.

Dorothe Norton:

Very good. You never went back then for masters or PhD?

Jack Fillio:

No.

Dorothe Norton:

So when and where and how did you meet your wife?

Jack Fillio:

I met my wife in Pittsfield. She worked as a dental hygienist in the same building where my aunt and my mother worked for a realty company. And they kept telling her about Jack. So one day I asked her out. Well, I met her at a bar one night where all the young people would go on Thursday nights. So I asked her out, and that was in September, and we were married the following February.

Dorothe Norton:

Well, that's very nice. Do you have any children?

Jack Fillio:

Three children.

Dorothe Norton:

And what are they doing now?

Jack Fillio:

Well, the oldest, Amanda, is living about 10 miles from here. She has 2 kids, and she works for a construction company as a secretary. The next one is down in Washington; he works for the City of Alexandria as their website director. And my youngest daughter is in San Francisco, she works for a computer firm out there.

Dorothe Norton:

Three daughters.

Jack Fillio:

No, a son and 2 daughters.

Dorothe Norton:

Oh, a son and 2 daughters. I have a daughter and 2 sons.

So why did you want to work for the Service?

Jack Fillio:

Well, initially, like I said, I went for one year at Northeastern for engineering and didn't particularly care for that. While I was in the military I thought about it a lot, of course you had a lot of free time every now and then, and I said, "Well, you know, I like the outdoors and I like animals and I like to hunt and fish. Sounds like that might be a worthwhile pursuit." So I tried that.

Dorothe Norton:

What was your first professional job?

Jack Fillio:

The first job I got was on the Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge in western New York, but it was with Job Corps. It was in 1965, right after I graduated. It was the only position I could get at the time.

Dorothe Norton:

And where did you from there?

Jack Fillio:

From there I went to the Erie National Wildlife Refuge in northeastern Pennsylvania. From the Erie Refuge I went to the Montezuma Refuge in central New York. Then I went to Brigantine Refuge in southern New Jersey. From southern New Jersey I took a big jump to Alaska to Kenai National Moose Range. From the Moose Range I jumped the gun all the way to north Jersey to the Great Swamp Refuge. And from the Great Swamp I went to Parker River here in Massachusetts, and that's where I retired.

Dorothe Norton:

And what did you think the pay and benefits were like, like when you started?

Jack Fillio:

When I started?

Dorothe Norton:

And as you went on, yeah.

Jack Fillio:

Looking back, because it's much easier to give a response to that because you can see where... My first salary was \$5,333.00 a year. And my son probably makes that and my daughter probably makes that in an hour! They're in six figures with these computer things. But we've never been poor.

Dorothe Norton:

So you had promotion opportunities as you went along?

Jack Fillio:

We had promotional opportunities, we moved up the ladder relatively well I guess. We've always enjoyed moving about, meeting new people, new places.

Dorothe Norton:

What date did you retire?

Jack Fillio:

I retired January of the year 2000.

Dorothe Norton:

And what was your position that you retired from?

Jack Fillio:

I was refuge manager at the Parker River Refuge.

Dorothe Norton:

So that's when you left us. Do you think that your career affected your family at all, your wife and children?

Jack Fillio:

It got to be a little difficult moving about all the time. It was hard to leave some places, let's put it that way.

Dorothe Norton:

Did you receive any training for different jobs that you had?

Jack Fillio:

With the Fish and Wildlife Service, oh yes, we received training all the time. A lot of it might have been administrative because as you got up to be a manager you had to learn the budgetary process and zero-base budgeting, whatever they were doing that administration. So yes, we received a lot of training. I think it was all worthwhile. A lot of personnel training too.

Dorothe Norton:

And what hours did you work?

Jack Fillio:

Most of the refuges I guess were 7:00 or 8:00 until 5:00 or something like that, it all depended. In the younger years, as an assistant manager, you didn't stop. As you got older, with family obligations, you came home more often.

Dorothe Norton:

So what were your day-to-day duties on the refuge?

Jack Fillio:

Basically, the managerial aspect. Making sure that we were supplied, making sure that the bills were paid. Projects and jobs were carried out. The subordinates were doing their positions, evaluating them as they went along and supervising them. The general supervisorial level.

Dorothe Norton:

What tools and instruments did you use in your job?

Jack Fillio:

Common sense most of the time!

Dorothe Norton:

Did you witness any new service inventions or innovations?

Jack Fillio:

Some, yes, in various aspects. When we were in Alaska a friend of mine was in the Fishery Services Division, and they used to fly to all of these lakes and do wintertime surveys. And someone had developed a board that they could drill 2 holes in the ice so many yards apart, put this board in and keep tugging on it and it would move towards the other hole. Amazing how it worked, I never did understand 100%, but that way they could spread the net out.

Dorothe Norton:

Did you work with animals at all?

Jack Fillio:

I did a lot of banding, migratory birds, Canada geese, some mourning dove work. We did some trapping and predator control aspects and things like that. Those are the old days, they don't do that anymore.

Dorothe Norton:

How did you feel toward the animals?

Jack Fillio:

As far as hunting and fishing, I have nothing against hunting and fishing as I'm a hunter and fisherman myself. And I don't have any problems with people doing it properly.

Dorothe Norton:

What support did you receive locally, regionally, and federally?

Jack Fillio:

Pretty much pretty good support. At the Parker River Refuge it was quite controversial because people thought it was there's and they wanted to use it anyway they could. So we had to regulate surf fisherman driving vehicles on the beach, which was a traditional use. We did have a controlled public deer hunt, which did not meet the public's eye in

that segment of it. We closed the beach; threatened species, the piping plover would nest there so we closed the beach during its nesting period, and that wasn't popular. But for the general part, we got support from the regional office and the Washington office in what we were doing for wildlife.

Dorothe Norton:

That's good. How do you think the Service was perceived by people outside of the agency?

Jack Fillio:

Outside of the agency I had the impression that people thought we were too restrictive, too restrictive in allowing the use on national wildlife refuges. But I think the more educated they were, the more they saw what we were doing, and the more they appreciated it.

Dorothe Norton:

Well that's good. What projects were you involved in?

Jack Fillio:

Well, specifically particularly with the Parker River Refuge, we finally got our road paved. We had a gravel road which was about 6 miles long, and the agreement was to pave half of it. We met opposition when they were going to do it. We got that done. We got a new restroom built. We got some programs started, the piping plover, the beach closure, the deer hunt. So those were the main projects.

Dorothe Norton:

That's good. Were there any major issues that you had to deal with?

Jack Fillio:

Again, one of the major issues was the closure of the beach for the piping plover.

Dorothe Norton:

They just did that again now didn't they down in New York on Long Island?

Jack Fillio:

Several refuges are doing it now, yes. I think we were the first to do it actually.

Dorothe Norton:

Were there any major impediments to your job or your career?

Jack Fillio:

Probably the major impediment was the politics that went on at the regional and field level. It was difficult to overcome some of that.

Dorothe Norton:

Who were your supervisors?

Jack Fillio:

My supervisors? Recently Don Frickie and Don Young, they've all retired now.

Dorothe Norton:

Don Young was from Region 3 at one time.

And who are some of the individuals who shaped your career?

Jack Fillio:

Now you're going to ask me to remember things! Let's see, Clay Hardy was probably one of the most influential. He was the manager at Montezuma when I went there, and I spent a couple of years at Montezuma. And years later, when I transferred to the Kenai Moose Range, Clay was in the regional area office then in Anchorage, and we stayed with him and met up again. He was one of the first.

Dorothe Norton:

And who were some of the people you knew outside of the Service? Do you think they would be able to work for the Service like today?

Jack Fillio:

Well, that's kind of a tough question because the Service has changed so much. And I've seen other employees, supervisors, and whatnot be called dinosaurs. And I probably became a dinosaur because the way the Service is today wasn't the same as when I started. So that's a difficult question to answer. But a lot of the young people coming up today are probably more liberal in their thinking and probably could fit in.

Dorothe Norton:

Do you remember who the presidents were or secretaries of interior or directors of the Service when you were working for us?

Jack Fillio:

Well, President Nixon was in office when I was in Alaska. And he put a freeze on government hiring, and for 6 months I didn't know if I was going to have a job or not. And Nixon was the one that said that there'll never be a \$1.00 loaf of bread and we were already paying \$1.25 in Alaska. And Hickel was one of the Secretary of the Interior, and I was in when Watt was in.

Dorothe Norton:

Do you think changes in administrations affected our work? Like democrats versus republicans or independents?

Jack Fillio:

Well, I think the changes itself were, not so much the party. As I mentioned when we first met, zero-based budgeting; every time a new administration came in everything changed and we never had a chance to really test what we were doing. Change, change,

change, change, change for the sake of change because of the party change. And no matter if it was working, we still had to change. And I found that frustrating as hell.

Dorothe Norton:

In your opinion, who were the individuals who helped shape the Service, the Fish and Wildlife Service?

Jack Fillio:

Oh I guess you'd have to go back in history to some of the J. Clark Salyer's and people of that nature. Directors in my tenure; Lynn Greenwalt was pretty influential. I mean he was a down to earth Service director.

Dorothe Norton:

What was the high point in your career?

Jack Fillio:

High point in my career was probably getting my first manager job at Great Swamp.

Dorothe Norton:

How about the low point?

Jack Fillio:

The low point was in Alaska when I was told I had a possibility of losing my job.

Dorothe Norton:

And do you ever wish you had done anything differently?

Jack Fillio:

I don't think so. I pretty much enjoyed my career, I pretty much enjoyed doing what I did and living where I lived because we had a lot of different experiences.

Dorothe Norton:

Did you ever have a dangerous or frightening experience related to your position?

Jack Fillio:

At Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge they had a controlled public deer hunt and an anonymous phone call threatened the lives of my children, who went to school in a police cruiser for a week or so because of the hunting of the deer.

Dorothe Norton:

How about a humorous? Did you ever have a real humorous experience?

Jack Fillio:

At Iroquois Refuge, when I was with Job Corps, I went out with the biologist at the time, and it was a windy day and it was in the spring and I was paddling the back of the canoe and he was in the front. We went up to this tree that was about 6 or 8 feet off the water

with a limb, it had a Canada goose nest in it. He said, "Hold the canoe and I'll grab the tree and look up and see how many eggs are in there." Well, he got up there and the wind blew the canoe away, and the next thing I knew he was standing in the water!

Dorothe Norton:

Well, I'm glad you consider that humorous.

Jack Fillio:

Well, I didn't get wet!

Dorothe Norton:

What do you like to tell other people about your career and about the Service?

Jack Fillio:

Well, I will tell them everything if they've got enough time. And I think the major thing is that, like I said earlier, the Fish and Wildlife Service is probably misunderstood. Most of the people at Great Swamp, when we moved there, were opposed to the deer hunt. We got into the society of the local community, the fire department. My wife was on the First Aid Squad. People got to know us, we talked to them. And after awhile they came around, they understood why we were doing what we were doing. And then didn't oppose it as much. The same thing at Parker River, the more you know the people, the more you talk to them, the more you educate them, the better it is.

Dorothe Norton:

That's good. What were some of the changes that you observed in the Service in the years that you worked?

Jack Fillio:

Well early on, when I was an assistant in some of the stations, public use wasn't as prominent as it is today. In those days you could say you worked the (**unclear**) sanctuary, where the only people running around were the managers and the Service people. We didn't have a lot of public use. And now we have probably more than we can handle quite frankly.

Dorothe Norton:

What were some of the changes that you observed in the Service, like in personnel and in environment?

Jack Fillio:

Personnel; I think with the structuring that happened probably about 5 or 10 years ago, with the change in the supervisory levels at different areas within the regions at area offices, then they switched to the geographic zones. I think we got more top heavy, there were more chiefs than there were Indians.

Dorothe Norton:

And what are your thoughts on the future? Like where do you think the Service is heading for the next decade or so?

Jack Fillio:

Well, I think they're probably doing a better job of telling people who they are, and I think they ought to continue that. Because that was the main thing in my career, people just really didn't know who we were. They thought we were the Park Service, they thought that we were the Forest Service. They never knew who we were. We've got to make sure people know who we are and what we do.

Dorothe Norton:

Very good. And do you have any photographs or documents you'd like to donate or share or have copies made?

Jack Fillio:

Well, I probably do but I have to dig them out somewhere, I've got them in boxes.

Dorothe Norton:

Well, if you ever find them you can send them to me or you can just send me an email and then I'll let you know how they want them.

And who else do you think we should be interviewing, anybody special?

Jack Fillio:

I haven't kept up with all the stuff. I've been so darned busy now I should probably go back to work so I can rest!

Dorothe Norton:

When you retire sometimes that happens doesn't it. Well, I want to thank you so much for the time that you were able to give to me for this day and this interview. And it was nice to meet you.

Jack Fillio:

My pleasure. And it's nice to meet you Dorothe.

Dorothe Norton:

Would you like to have a copy of this after it is transcribed?

Jack Fillio:

Sure, I'd appreciate that.

Dorothe Norton:

Okay, then we'll have one sent to you.

KEY WORDS: Jack Fillio, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge, Job Corps, Erie National Wildlife Refuge, Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge, Brigantine National Wildlife Refuge, Kenai National Moose Range, Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge, Parker River National Wildlife Refuge, Fishery Services Division, bird banding, trapping, predator control, piping plover, Don Frickie, Don Young, Region 3, Clay Hardy, President Richard Nixon, Secretary of Interior Walter Hickel, James Watt, zero-based budgeting, J. Clark Salyer, Lynn Greenwalt,